

# The Italian Army Moves Toward the XXI Century

by Lieutenant Colonel Osvaldo Bizzari

*A NATO ally transitions to a professional army, a redefined mission, and the introduction of several new combat systems*

## Introduction

All armies of the main industrialized countries are now passing through a crucial time, characterized by a new geostrategic and geopolitical environment, an era of declining defense resources, and the rapid technical evolution brought about by the Information Age. The events of the last few years have also brought to light a sense of interdependence in international security. Security requirements are common to all, but there is no international event which can be considered only the concern of "others."

Given these changes, Italy is redefining its views on security and reshaping its military to play an effective role in maintaining the military balance in the complex Mediterranean region. In the following article, the author, currently the Italian liaison officer at the U.S. Army Armor Center, would like to provide a broad overview of the Italian Army's current evolution. By sharing this kind of knowledge among NATO countries, we can better understand each other and cooperate more effectively in a multinational environment.

## Foreword

The geostrategic changes that occurred in the 1990s profoundly modified the international arena. On the one hand, the possibility of a global conflict has become remote, allowing great reductions in the defense establishments of most major nations. On the other hand, there is an increased risk of being involved in so-called "minor" conflicts. A new global balance is now developing, closely dependent on local and regional micro-balances whose at-

tainment is often the cause of new conflicts.

Yesterday's threats are today called risks, but the difference is not substantial. What has changed for the Italian Army, which once operated only within its own borders, is that Italian Armed Forces have been employed in overseas operations to an extent unprecedented in the period following World War II, and in a context marked by uncertainty.

Driving this change in orientation is the international community's new concern with controlling regional tensions with multinational missions — Operations Other Than War. These actions have heavily involved the Italian Army, which has deployed to many of these trouble spots, including Kurdistan, Albania, Mozambique, Somalia, and the Balkans.

These changes, given the new geostrategic situation and the trend toward declining defense resources, inspired the reorganization of the Italian Army which is still ongoing. The main factors on which the "New Defense Model" is based are the geostrategic position of Italy, strategic functions, structure (forces) and equipment.

## Geostrategic Position of Italy

In geostrategical terms, Italy is located in a very sensitive area, the Mediterranean basin, a region where highly different living standards and population growth rates are in themselves a cause of instability. In addition, the changes in continental Europe, the explosion of ethnic, religious, and nationalistic rivalries in the Balkan area, radicalism, regional crises and conflicts, underdevelopment, terrorism,

and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) significantly increase the likelihood of instability in the region. When we speak of the Mediterranean basin, we actually refer to a wider theater that stretches from the western approaches of Gibraltar through the Black Sea to the Caucasus, and through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea to the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, right up to the Persian Gulf. Within that region, there are two crisis belts, one running across the southern border, the other spanning the east. These two belts seem to overlap at the geographic crossroads comprising the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the near Middle East. Italy stands on the edge of this crossroads and is, therefore, particularly sensitive to this area's stability and security. Historically, Italy has always had two geostrategic orientations, one Mediterranean, the other continental. For this reason, Italy has been trying in every way to promote Mediterranean links, both within the European integration process and within NATO. The changes in Europe's geostrategic situation have not affected our basic foreign and security policy: support for a stronger European and Western European Union in a solid transatlantic alliance, certainly reaching out to the east, but also to the south, although in a different manner.

## The Three Major Strategic Functions

The "New Defense Model" is aimed at accomplishing three major strategic functions:

The first function is **to maintain a presence in and surveillance of the entire area of strategic interest**, to in-

Italy's cavalry regiments are equipped with 400 of these 8-wheeled Centauro armored cars, armed with 105mm cannon that fire standard NATO 105mm ammunition types.



clude military cooperation and training exchanges, disarmament control, and enforcement of trust and security measures, "forward presence" as a natural outgrowth of "forward defense," information activities, and control of non-allied or potentially hostile forces, surveillance of the land, borders, airspace, naval docks, and exclusively economic zones, and civilian-protection support activities.

This function is eminently national in nature, even though it includes supporting the accomplishment of similar purposes within NATO and Europe. It is the most likely, and requires active forces with a high degree of combat readiness and training, but carries the least potential for danger.

**The second strategic function, defending external national interests and contributing to international security,** focuses on managing crises in the area of strategic interest, and non-bordering areas. Italian forces might act alone in these cases, but are more likely to participate as part of an international initiative led by NATO, the UN, or the West European Union. This strategic function provides for both a limited use of forces and a low level of risk, but may result in direct conflict.

It has an overall associated danger that is variable and difficult to quantify and requires active forces with a high level of combat readiness and training, highly mobile and transportable, and falls, in the majority of cases, within the pre-established commitments made within the Alliance or regionally.

The third function, defending the national territory, would respond to direct threat or an actual act of aggression

against our national territory (land, airspace, and sea). Italian forces would perform this function within national boundaries, but might have to carry the defensive response beyond national boundaries to remove the offensive capabilities of an aggressor. This function has a low possibility of occurrence, but can present differing degrees of danger, usually inversely proportional to the amount of forewarning.

Beyond these three strategic functions, the "New Defense Model" provides for two further functions within the nation itself:

**Support in safeguarding free institutions, when required.** These would be missions carried out within our national territory. They have a low probability of occurrence.

**Support for the collective national good.** Italian forces could also be used in relief of national emergencies. These missions carry an almost nonexistent associated level of danger.

So, in practical terms, the tasks entrusted to the Italian armed forces by our government laws are:

- To ensure the defense of our national territory
- To aid in safeguarding free institutions
- To contribute to the collective national welfare in public disasters
- To carry out peace missions and international security operations.

Consequently, the missions assigned to our ground forces can be boiled down to **Traditional Operations and Operations Other Than War.** That

would include safeguarding national territory, or that of an allied nation against direct aggression, and peace support and humanitarian relief, primarily in a multinational context.

## Land Forces

Given the reconfiguration of the traditional threat of the past and the globalization of the security concept, the Italian Army General Staff has reorganized the Army's structure within the limitations imposed by political authorities, who have determined the size of our ground forces — 150,000 soldiers, organized in 13 brigades of 40-50 maneuver regiments — and the financial resources available.

### *Territorial Organization*

In this sector as well, there is the problem of revising the organization without compromising the effectiveness of various agencies involved in fields like logistic support, medical support, recruitment,...etc. The number of Military Region Commands is to be reduced from 7 to 5. Within the Recruitment and Selection sector, 30 of 55 now-existing offices will be inactivated. Medical support is being revised, with plans for one general military hospital, six convalescent hospitals, and 11 service hospitals. Similar cuts affect the Transportation and Materials section, Administration, and General Services.

### *Scholastic Training Organization*

Special attention has been addressed to reconfiguring the Army's school system in line with the strength of our future Army. The "New Defense Model"



This is the 6x6 version of the Puma, under consideration as a troop carrier to accompany the Centauro armored car in cavalry units.

calls for 15,000 officers, 35,000 NCOs, and 100,000 troops, of which 60,000 are volunteers and 40,000 draftees. The move from a conscription Army to a largely professional Army will require improved schools in order to maintain overall current training capabilities. A substantial reduction has been planned in the number of training regiments, now 29. Under the new organization, there will be 5-6 for volunteers and 11-12 for draftees.

The new Italian combat forces will be made up of units, typically brigades (thirteen), of differing degrees of combat readiness, differentiated by reaction time and level of professionalism (conscripts or volunteers).

The brigade will be characterized by flexibility, mobility, versatility, and high combat readiness and operational capability. They will be earmarked for operations both inside and outside Italy's national territory. They will be fully capable of participating as elements of multinational forces. Each brigade will be formed with four combat arms regiments made up entirely of volunteers.

The other eight brigades will be employed as back-up forces for any other requirement and for the support and safeguarding of free institutions and the collective good. These brigades will each consist of two to three combat arms regiments, principally manned by conscripts.

Overall, the Italian Army will include four mechanized brigades, two armored brigades equipped with combat tanks, two light armored brigades equipped with wheeled armored carriers, three

mountain brigades, an airborne brigade, a cavalry brigade, and an amphibious brigade with both Army and Navy units.

These brigade-level units will be clearly integrated with adequate quantities of combat support and combat service support units, to include:

- 23 land and anti-aircraft artillery regiments;
- 10 engineer regiments;
- 13 signal regiments;
- 32 logistic regiments;
- 15 aviation battalions.

### Acquisition and Modernization Programs

In order to achieve the objectives established by the "New Defense Model," various areas of the Army organization will be affected by procurement and modernization programs. The most important ones involve basic weapons and equipment, maneuvers and tactical and logistic mobility, support for land and anti-aircraft weapons, communications, command and control.

#### Basic weapons and equipment

Italy is also modernizing its equipment and individual weapons. The army is getting the Beretta 9mm pistol (the same as the U.S. M9), and rifles and machine guns are being acquired in 5.56mm to replace the current 7.62mm weapons. All of these weapons will be made in Italy. Important programs are also under development in the antitank (AT) weapons sector.

After the introduction and successful use of the TOW (basic and improved) and of the MILAN, it has recently been decided to introduce the TOW 2-B and the MILAN with an improved warhead. PANZERFAUST 3 was chosen as the short range antitank weapon, and some of them are already in commission.

Italy, together with France and Germany, is working on a new antitank fiber-optic guided missile system (POLYPHEM), which includes a video camera in the warhead capable of sending images to the operator. The weapon range is some 20 km, to be improved to 50 km.

#### Tactical and logistic mobility

Our "New Defense Model" will bring about a considerable reduction in the number of tanks available. In spite of this reduction in quantity, a qualitative improvement will characterize our new fleet of tanks. This objective will be achieved by the introduction of modernized tanks. We are procuring 200 Ariete-1, entirely Italian-made combat tanks, and we've ordered 120 Leopard-1A5 turrets to be installed on Leopard 1 tanks already in service.

By the beginning of the year 2000, the Army's tank fleet will consist of 450 tanks, including 200 Ariete, 120 Leopard-1A5 and 130 Leopard-1 A2s.

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Studies are also underway to increase the lethality, survivability, and mobility of the Ariete.

The Italian Army's cavalry regiments have just received 400 of their new wheeled armored carriers, called Centauro, which have a 105mm gun and are particularly suited to operating with a high degree of strategic mobility in large open spaces.

In order to have personnel carriers that can operate at the same speed and operational effectiveness of the Centauro, we are considering the possibility of outfitting reconnaissance squads with light wheeled armored carriers, called Pumas, in either the 4x4 (four-

wheel drive) and/or 6x6 (six-wheel drive) versions.

The M113 remains in service as the standard tracked armored personnel carrier, pending the introduction of the Dardo, a new infantry fighting vehicle similar to your Bradley. At least two mech infantry regiments and the infantry training schools will be outfitted with this vehicle by the end of this year.

Army aviation is also being modernized, both attack helicopters and tactical transport helicopters. Thirty-eight of the sixty Mangusta A-129 antitank helicopters, similar to the U.S. Apache, have just been delivered. In addition, some Mangustas are being converted from AT helicopters into scout aircraft. France, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy are collaborating on a tactical transport helicopter, the NH-90, to replace older aircraft such as the AB 205, AB 212 and AB 412. Finally, in the fixed-wing sector, we have begun to gradually replace the L-19 and SM-1019 light aircraft with the twin-engine Dornier-228.

#### *Antiaircraft and land weapons*

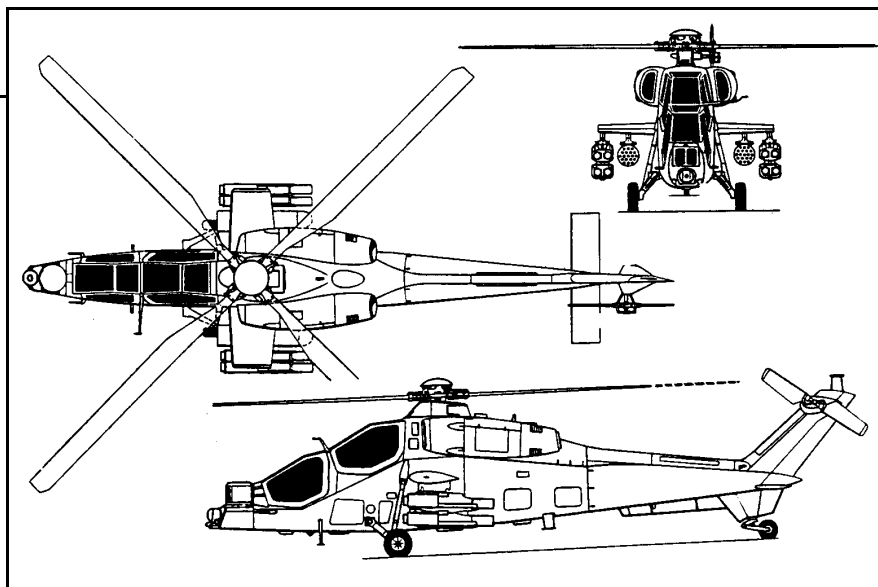
The most important programs in the land warfare sectors involve the introduction, already underway, of MLRS rocket launchers and development of the FIROS-30 rocket launchers which are designed to give the artillery system the necessary fire-saturation capability needed in the 30-km battlefield area. The M-109 self-propelled howitzers are being modernized with new barrels to offer longer range.

Air-defense is being modernized with SIDAM four-barreled 25 mm SP guns, along with Skyguard-Aspide, a low and very low altitude air defense missile system.

A replacement for the Stinger shoulder-fired antiaircraft missile system, due by the year 2000, will offer reprogrammability. In addition, a new, advanced, medium-range surface-to-air missile system is being developed as a replacement for the Hawk system as part of a joint venture between Italy and France. The SAMP-T will replace the Hawk in the XXI century.

#### *Communications, Command and Control*

A new, integrated battlefield communication system, called CATRIN, is being designed. It will strengthen battle-



Italian Army equipment modernization includes 60 A129 Mangusta ("Mongoose") antitank helicopters. These twin-engined two-seaters can carry TOW, Hellfire, and HOT missiles, rockets, and .50 cal. machine gun pods.

field surveillance and target acquisition, and offers a modern system for managing Army airspace and weapons systems. Another program will create an automatic and digital command and control system called SIACCON, which is a natural complement to CATRIN. CATRIN primarily supports intelligence, while SIACCON is to be used for command and control.

In addition, we are about to introduce new VHF radio equipment for platoons and companies, and HF/BLU radio equipment for communication at the battalion, regimental, brigade, and division levels. Finally, a new electronic warfare system has been introduced into service for intercepting and locating radar. In sum, the Italian Army will soon be able to count on modern systems suited to meet both SIGINT and electronic-warfare requirements.

#### **Conclusion**

The picture presented above, although necessarily an overview, was intended to give an idea of the profound changes which the Italian Army is undergoing, at a time when it is also deeply engaged in many intense and diversified activities.

In addition to downsizing, the modernization of the Italian Army has been and will be another crucial and important key aspect. In a fiscally constrained environment, the introduction of new weapons systems and new advanced technologies will require years of effort

in order to stay within annual budget constraints, but the achievement of the above-mentioned objectives will provide a reshaped land force quantitatively reduced but qualitatively improved so as to meet both the new national and international requirements created by the realities of the 21st century.

Lieutenant Colonel Osvaldo Bizzari, currently the Italian Army liaison to the Armor Center, is a 1979 graduate of the Italian Army Military Academy. As a second lieutenant, he attended the School of Applied Military Science and the Airborne School, and was later assigned to the 7th Armor Battalion as platoon leader. As a captain, he commanded a tank company and has been a battalion S3 and S4 (3rd Armor Battalion). From 1987 to 1989 he was assigned, as staff officer, to the Military Academy and later to the Italian Defense General Staff (Logistic Department-Vice Section Chief, NATO Infrastructure). After attending the Italian Army War College (basic and advanced course), he was assigned, as Chief, Logistic Staff Section, to the 5th Italian Army Corps.